**Marxism**

A sociological approach to literature that viewed works of literature or art as the products of historical forces that can be analysed by looking at the material conditions in which they were formed. In Marxist ideology, **what we often classify as a world view (such as the Victorian age) is actually the articulations of the dominant class.** Marxism generally focuses on the clash between the dominant and repressed classes in any given age and also may encourage art to imitate what is often termed an "objective" reality. Contemporary Marxism is much broader in its focus, and views art as simultaneously reflective and autonomous to the age in which it was produced. The Frankfurt School is also associated with Marxism (Abrams, p. 178, Childers and Hentzi, pp. 175-179). **Major figures** include Karl Marx, Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Raymond Williams, Louis Althusser (ALT-whos-sair), Walter Benjamin (ben-yeh-MEEN), Antonio Gramsci (GRAWM-shee), Georg Lukacs (lou-KOTCH), and Friedrich Engels, Theordor Adorno (a-DOR-no), Edward Ahern, Gilles Deleuze (DAY-looz) and Felix Guattari (GUAT-eh-ree).

**Key Terms**(note: **definitions below taken from Ann B. Dobie's text, *Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*** - see *General Resources* below):

**Commodificaion** - "the attitude of valuing things not for their utility but for their power to impress others or for their resale possibilities" (92).

**Conspicuous consumption -** "the obvious acquisition of things only for their sign value and/or exchange value" (92).

**Dialectical materialism** - "the theory that history develops neither in a random fashion nor in a linear one but instead as struggle between contradictions that ultimately find resolution in a synthesis of the two sides. For example, class conflicts lead to new social systems" (92).

**Material circumstances** - "the economic conditions underlying the society. To understand social events, one must have a grasp of the material circumstances and the historical situation in which they occur" (92). Analyse the material circumstances and historical setting of the poem.

**Reflectionism** - associated with Vulgar Marxism - "a theory that the superstructure of a society mirrors its economic base and, by extension, that a text reflects the society that produced it" (92).

**Superstructure** - "The social, political, and ideological systems and institutions--for example, the values, art, and legal processes of a society--that are generated by the base" (92).

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* Jefferson, Anne and David Robey.*Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction*. See chapter 6.
* Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature.* Oxford: OUP, 1977.
* See also the works of Walter Benjamin, Tony Bennett, Terry Eagleton, John Frow, Georg Lukacs, Pierre Macherey, Michael Ryan, and Ronald Taylor.

**Suggested Websites:**

* ["Definition of Marxist Criticism" - virtuaLit (Bedford-St. Martin's resource)](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/virtualit/poetry/critical_define/crit_marx.html)
* ["Marxism" - Wikipedia Encyclopedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxism)
* [Marxist Theory and Criticism - from the Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Criticism](http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins_guide_to_literary_theory/marxist_theory_and_criticism-_2.html)
* ["Marxism and Ideology" by Dr. Mary Klages - University of Colorado at Boulder](http://www.colorado.edu/English/ENGL2012Klages/marxism.html)

<http://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/marxism/modules/introduction.html>

MARXISM IS COMPLICATED by the fact that Marx is by no means the only influence on this critical school; indeed, given the various sorts of political movements that have been inspired by this thinker (socialism, Trotskyism, communism, Leninism, Stalinism, Maoism, radical democracy, etc.), one despairs at trying to provide a fair and lucid introduction. Add to that the fact that Marx himself changed his mind on various issues or sometimes expressed opinions that appear mutually exclusive, and one is faced with a rather high hurdle. Nonetheless, there are a number of Marxist thoughts and thinkers that have been especially influential on recent scholarly developments (particularly in literary, cultural, and political studies). In short, the goal of this section of the Guide to Theory, as with any of the sections, is not to give an exhaustive account of this critical school but, rather, to give a sense for the major concepts influencing this approach while attempting to stay conscious of the various ways that individual terms have been contested over the last number of decades. The major distinction in Marxist thought that influences literary and cultural theory is that between traditional Marxists (sometimes, unfairly, called vulgar Marxists) and what are sometimes referred to as post-Marxists or neo-Marxists. The major distinction between these two versions of Marxist thought lies in the concept of ideology: traditional Marxists tend to believe that it is possible to get past ideology in an effort to reach some essential truth (eg. the stages of economic development). Post-Marxists, especially after Louis Althusser, tend to think of ideology in a way more akin to Jacques Lacan, as something that is so much a part of our culture and mental make-up that it actively determines what we commonly refer to as "reality." According to these post-Marxist critics, there may well be some hard kernel behind our obfuscating perceptions of reality but that kernel is by definition resistant to articulation. As soon as one attempts to articulate it, one is at risk of falling back into ideology. This understanding of ideology is what Fredric Jameson famously terms the "prison-house of language." ~~The links on the left will lead~~ you to specific ideas discussed by Marx and those "post-Marxists" who have proven to be most influential on literary and cultural studies; however, you might like to begin with a quick overview:  
**PLAYERS**

[KARL MARX](http://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/marxism/modules/marxideology.html) is, along with Freud, one of a handful of thinkers from the last two centuries who has had a truly transformative effect on society, on culture, and on our very understanding of ourselves. Although there were a few critics claiming an end to Marxist thought (and even an end to ideology) after the fall of the communist system in the former Soviet Union, Marxist thought has continued to have an important influence on critical thought, all the more so recently after the rise of globalization studies. As protests at recent G7 and IMF meetings make clear, the school can also still have important political effects.

[LOUIS ALTHUSSER](http://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/marxism/modules/althusserideology.html) represents an important break in Marxist thought, particularly when it comes to the notion of ideology. His Lacan-inspired version of Marxism significantly changed the way many Marxists approached both capitalism and hegemony after the Second World War.

[FREDRIC JAMESON](http://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/marxism/modules/jamesonideology.html) is surely the most influential contemporary Marxist thinker in the United States. His own alterations of and dialogue with Althusserian and Lacanian thought have established him as an important influence on the rise of globalization studies, an important critical school of the last few years. In particular, he has attempted to make sense of the continuing staying power of capitalism and the ways that capitalism has transformed since Marx wrote his critiques in the nineteenth century, addressing such issues as multi-national (or "late") capitalism, the power of the media, and the influence of postmodernity on Marxist debate. The lattermost issue is explored in the [Jameson modules under Postmodernism](http://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/postmodernism/modules/jamesonpostmodernity.html).

Felluga, Dino. "General Introduction to Marxism." *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*.

**Please visit Felluga’s site for terrific introduction to Marxism, terms, ways to apply etc**

<http://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/marxism/>

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| **Glossary of Literary Theory by Greig E. Henderson and Christopher Brown** |

**Marxist criticism:**

Criticism based on the historical, economic, and sociological theory of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. According to Marxism, the consciousness of a given class at a given historical moment derives from modes of material production. The set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and ideas that constitutes the consciousness of this class forms an ideological superstructure, and this ideological superstructure is shaped and determined by the material infrastructure or economic base. Hence the term "historical materialism." Marxism assumes the ontological priority of matter over mind and sees mind as the product of historical forces. There is thus a dialectical relationship between the literary work and its sociohistorical background. [Dialectical criticism](http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/glossary/Dialectical_criticism.html) focuses on the causal connections between the content or form of a literary work and the economic, class, social, or ideological factors that shape and determine that content or form. Bourgeois writers, for example, inevitably propagate a bourgeois ideology that seeks to universalize the status quo, to see it as natural rather than historical. The notion that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the class consciousness of the writer, the [ideology](http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/glossary/Ideology.html) of the work, and the sociohistorical background out of which it emerges is often labeled vulgar Marxism, even by Marxists themselves. Sophisticated Marxism, however, as Fredric Jameson points out, is concerned with "the influence of a given social raw material, not only on the content, but on the very form of the works themselves.... [The dialectical interaction of work and background], this fact of sheer interrelationship, is prior to any of the conceptual categories, such as causality, reflection, or analogy, subsequently evoked to explain it."

Marxist criticism is by no means a monolith. Georg Lukacs, for example, praises realism but attacks [modernism](http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/glossary/Modernism.html), seeing the latter, with its stream-of-consciousness techniques, as a decadent and desperate retreat into subjectivity, a feckless denial of the objective reality of class conflict and social contradictions, and an inadvertent testimony to the alienated state of the individual in mass society. The [Frankfurt School](http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/glossary/Frankfurt_School.html), on the other hand, holds that the modernist experimentation with disruptive forms implicitly provides a critique of mass society -- its fragmentation, its estrangement, its dehumanization. Bertolt Brecht deliberately uses[Formalist](http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/glossary/Formalism.html) strategies -- baring the device, [defamiliarization](http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/glossary/Defamiliarization.html), and [foregrounding](http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/glossary/Foregrounding.html) -- for Marxist purposes. Attempting to dissolve the illusion of reification back into the reality of human action, Brecht insists that historical conditions must not be seen as mysterious powers but as human action and that the critical attitude begins when one sees one's own epoch in historical terms. The alienation effect, which Brecht heralds as the supreme dramatic technique, defamiliarizes the present in order to divest it of any aura of permanence. By baring the device and stressing the theatricality of theater, Brecht makes his auditors aware that objects and institutions, which seem natural because of their familiarity, are in reality historical. Since they are the products of change, they become in their turn changeable. Moreover, recent Marxist criticism incorporates aspects of [structuralism](http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/glossary/Structuralism.html) and [poststructuralism](http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/glossary/Poststructuralism.html) -- Barthian [semiotics](http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/glossary/Semiotics.html), Lacanian [psychoanalysis](http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/glossary/Psycholanalytic_theory.html), Derridean[deconstruction](http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/glossary/Deconstruction.html), and [feminist criticism](http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/glossary/Feminist_criticism.html). Louis Althusser, for example, assimilates structuralism to Marxism.

Like sociological criticism, Marxist criticism is perpetually oriented to the social realities that condition works of art. Class status, gender, ideology, economic conditions, the literary marketplace, the reading public, and so forth -- all these factors define the dialectical relationship between literary productions and their sociohistorical contexts.

**Marxist criticism (very simply put) champions the downtrodden of socio-economic class, critiquing texts that assume a classist society of economic elitism and *hegemony*(Gramsci), and championing texts that support the "common man." In this century, the FRANKFURT SCHOOL's attacks on pop culture as a dehumanizing, *alienating* prop for the capitalist State have been influential. Recent neo-Marxist criticism also often includes a poststructuralist critique of the capitalist and cultural *ideology(superstructure)* that props up the dominant economic system *(base)*--e.g., ALTHUSSER's notions of *interpellation* and *state ideological apparatuses. CG’s Literary Criticism Page***

**VIP: MARXIST CRITICISM:**Because Marxist critics assume that conflicts between economic classes inevitably shape social reality, they emphasize the ways these struggles affect writers, audiences, and texts. They assume that literature will either reflect, reinforce, or undermine (or some combination of these) the dominant ideologies (i.e., standard patterns of thought) that help structure social relations. Marxist critics study the complex relations between literature and society, ideally seeking to promote social progress.

**LITERARY THEORIES: A QUICK SKETCH** by Robert C. Evans, [Auburn University Montgomery](http://www.aum.edu/#Auburn University at Montgomery) <http://www.mrbauld.com/theory.html>

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| DEFINITION OF MARXIST CRITICISM |
| C:\Users\EJW\Documents\English\2011\Extension\X Files\eng x files\world\virtuaLit Critical Approaches marxism_files\definition_subtitle.gif |
| C:\Users\EJW\Documents\English\2011\Extension\X Files\eng x files\world\virtuaLit Critical Approaches marxism_files\shim.gif Marxist criticism is a type of criticism in which literary works are viewed as the product of work and whose practitioners emphasize **the role of class and ideology as they reflect, propagate, and even challenge the prevailing social order.** Rather than viewing texts as repositories for hidden meanings, Marxist critics view texts as material products to be understood in broadly historical terms. In short, literary works are viewed as a product of work (and hence of the realm of production and consumption we call economics). C:\Users\EJW\Documents\English\2011\Extension\X Files\eng x files\world\virtuaLit Critical Approaches marxism_files\shim.gif Marxism began with Karl Marx, the nineteenth-century German philosopher best known for *Das Kapital* (1867; *Capital*), the seminal work of the communist movement. Marx was also the first Marxist literary critic, writing critical essays in the 1830s on such writers as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and William Shakespeare. Even after Marx met Friedrich Engels in 1843 and began collaborating on overtly political works such as *The German Ideology* (1846) and *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), he maintained a keen interest in literature. In *The German Ideology,* Marx and Engels discuss the relationship between the arts, politics, and basic economic reality in terms of a general social theory. **Economics, they argue, provides the *base,* or *infrastructure,* of society, from which a *superstructure* consisting of law, politics, philosophy, religion, and art emerges.** C:\Users\EJW\Documents\English\2011\Extension\X Files\eng x files\world\virtuaLit Critical Approaches marxism_files\shim.gif The revolution anticipated by Marx and Engels did not occur in their century, let alone in their lifetime. When it did occur, in 1917, it did so in a place unimagined by either theorist: Russia, a country long ruled by despotic czars but also enlightened by the works of powerful novelists and playwrights including Anton Chekhov, Alexander Pushkin, Leo Tolstoy, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Russia produced revolutionaries like Vladimir Lenin, who shared not only Marx's interest in literature but also his belief in its ultimate importance. Leon Trotsky, Lenin's comrade in revolution, took a strong interest in literary matters as well, publishing *Literature and Revolution* (1924), which is still viewed as a classic of Marxist literary criticism. C:\Users\EJW\Documents\English\2011\Extension\X Files\eng x files\world\virtuaLit Critical Approaches marxism_files\shim.gif Of those critics active in the Soviet Union after the expulsion of Trotsky and the triumph of Stalin, two stand out: Mikhail Bakhtin and Georg Lukács. Bakhtin viewed language—especially literary texts—in terms of discourses and dialogues. A novel written in a society in flux, for instance, might include an official, legitimate discourse, as well as one infiltrated by challenging comments. Lukács, a Hungarian who converted to Marxism in 1919, appreciated pre revolutionary realistic novels that broadly reflected cultural "totalities" and were populated with characters representing human "types" of the author's place and time. C:\Users\EJW\Documents\English\2011\Extension\X Files\eng x files\world\virtuaLit Critical Approaches marxism_files\shim.gif Perhaps because Lukács was the best of the Soviet communists writing Marxist criticism in the 1930s and 1940s, non-Soviet Marxists tended to develop their ideas by publicly opposing his. In Germany, dramatist and critic Bertolt Brecht criticized Lukács for his attempt to enshrine realism at the expense not only of the other "isms" but also of poetry and drama, which Lukács had largely ignored. Walter Benjamin praised new art forms ushered in by the age of mechanical reproduction, and Theodor Adorno attacked Lukács for his dogmatic rejection of nonrealist modern literature and for his elevation of content over form. C:\Users\EJW\Documents\English\2011\Extension\X Files\eng x files\world\virtuaLit Critical Approaches marxism_files\shim.gif In addition to opposing Lukács and his overly constrictive canon, non-Soviet Marxists took advantage of insights generated by non-Marxist critical theories being developed in post—World War II Europe. Lucien Goldmann, a Romanian critic living in Paris, combined structuralist principles with Marx’s base superstructure model **in order to show how economics determines the mental structures of social groups, which are reflected in literary texts.** Goldmann rejected the idea of individual human genius, choosing instead to see works as the "collective" products of "trans-individual" mental structures. **French Marxist Louis Althusser drew on the ideas of psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan and the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci, who discussed the relationship between ideology and hegemony, the pervasive system of assumptions and values that shapes the perception of reality for people in a given culture**. Althusser’s followers included Pierre Macherey, who in *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966) developed Althusser’s concept of the relationship between literature and ideology; Terry Eagleton, who proposes an elaborate theory about how history enters texts, which in turn may alter history; and Frederic Jameson, who has argued that form is "but the working out" of content "in the realm of the superstructure."  Adapted from *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*by Ross Murfin and Supriya M. Ray. Copyright 1998 by Bedford Books. |

See:  **[PPT]** [**Marxist Literary Criticism**](http://www.mccd.edu/faculty/pirov/Hum21/marxism.ppt)

www.mccd.edu/faculty/pirov/Hum21/**marxism**.**ppt**

File Format: Microsoft Powerpoint - [Quick View](http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:Xd81dxkRiEQJ:www.mccd.edu/faculty/pirov/Hum21/marxism.ppt+Marxist+literary+theory+ppt&hl=en&gl=au&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEEShFfEhaFd1CjFK1oH4PcXE3YR79esSx8diu2dSYf2_tNhmJ331F47NjZs3Lv9bHs1ILHSiuOqhb9sijvXsSKMc9OCkXcFrezHKFuR9VWxcuifiDsAmGRPvGhTNEJ_DN1t8YMtxJ&sig=AHIEtbSMlfqMmo1TCWXsb4Lo758iMFeMgw)  
**Marxist Criticism**. An Introduction. **Marxist** Critics. Apply the economic/social principles and ideas of Karl Marx to film and the film industry. **...**

## Marxism and Critical Theory

Marxist literary theories tend to focus on the representation of class conflict as well as the reinforcement of class distinctions through the medium of literature. Marxist theorists use traditional techniques of literary analysis but subordinate aesthetic concerns to the final social and political meanings of literature. Marxist theorist often champion authors sympathetic to the working classes and authors whose work challenges economic equalities found in capitalist societies. In keeping with the totalizing spirit of Marxism, literary theories arising from the Marxist paradigm have not only sought new ways of understanding the relationship between economic production and literature, but all cultural production as well. Marxist analyses of society and history have had a profound effect on literary theory and practical criticism, most notably in the development of “New Historicism” and “Cultural Materialism.”

The Hungarian theorist Georg Lukacs contributed to an understanding of the relationship between historical materialism and literary form, in particular with realism and the historical novel. Walter Benjamin broke new ground in his work in his study of aesthetics and the reproduction of the work of art. The Frankfurt School of philosophers, including most notably Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse—after their emigration to the United States—played a key role in introducing Marxist assessments of culture into the mainstream of American academic life. These thinkers became associated with what is known as “Critical theory,” one of the constituent components of which was a critique of the instrumental use of reason in advanced capitalist culture. “Critical theory” held to a distinction between the high cultural heritage of Europe and the mass culture produced by capitalist societies as an instrument of domination. “Critical theory” sees in the structure of mass cultural forms—jazz, Hollywood film, advertising—a replication of the structure of the factory and the workplace. Creativity and cultural production in advanced capitalist societies were always already co-opted by the entertainment needs of an economic system that requires sensory stimulation and recognizable cliché and suppressed the tendency for sustained deliberation.

The major Marxist influences on literary theory since the Frankfurt School have been Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton in Great Britain and Frank Lentricchia and Fredric Jameson in the United States. Williams is associated with the New Left political movement in Great Britain and the development of “Cultural Materialism” and the Cultural Studies Movement, originating in the 1960s at Birmingham University’s Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Eagleton is known both as a Marxist theorist and as a popularizer of theory by means of his widely read overview, Literary Theory. Lentricchia likewise became influential through his account of trends in theory, After the New Criticism. Jameson is a more diverse theorist, known both for his impact on Marxist theories of culture and for his position as one of the leading figures in theoretical postmodernism. Jameson’s work on consumer culture, architecture, film, literature and other areas, typifies the collapse of disciplinary boundaries taking place in the realm of Marxist and postmodern cultural theory. Jameson’s work investigates the way the structural features of late capitalism—particularly the transformation of all culture into commodity form—are now deeply embedded in all of our ways of communicating.

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/literary/#Marxism and Critical Theory>

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See  **[PPT]**  **[Marxist Literary Theory](http://teacherweb.com/GA/BenjaminEMaysHighSchool/MsMarciaJackson/MarciaMarxistTheory.ppt)**

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File Format: Microsoft Powerpoint - [Quick View](http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:F6fkkqvoj6EJ:teacherweb.com/GA/BenjaminEMaysHighSchool/MsMarciaJackson/MarciaMarxistTheory.ppt+Marxist+literary+theory+ppt&hl=en&gl=au&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESiQIwRYp3nn-WmXNwwxm70ll0uzUjW1jfVBcexRwjNm04QwJbeUDNFQ8NheKZ3sPwWS6AahCFsn4O57JJ5dQlkI_Q4DnQcH-r32vdYZYqRGzDu0V4XM6Esn_H_bHkI4V8G5dlYH&sig=AHIEtbQ6686eHzs35b0wne04FB6doqO1DQ)  
**Marxist Literary Theory**. A form of critique or discourse for interrogating all societies and their texts in terms of certain specific issues – including **...**

Google Marxist Literary Criticism or Marxist Literary Theory PPT for lots of introductory PowerPoint presentations.

<http://www.lawrence.edu/dept/english/courses/60A/marxist.html>

**Introduction**

Marxist literary criticism is based upon the political and economic theories of the German philosopher Karl Marx. In works like *The German Ideology* and *The Communist Manifesto*, written with Frederick Engels , Marx proposes a model of history in which economic and political conditions determine social conditions. Marx and Engels were responding to social hardships stemming from the rise of capitalism. Appropriately, their theories are formulated specifically to analyze how society functions in a state of upheaval and constant change.

**A materialist view of history**

Using Hegel's theory of dialectic , which suggests that history progresses through the resolution of contradictions within a particular aspect of reality, Marx and Engels posit a materialist account of history that focuses upon the struggles and tensions within society. As society forms more complex modes of production, it becomes increasingly stratified; and the resulting tensions necessitate changes in society. For example, the introduction of heavy machinery into the feudal economic system fragmented existing social structures and necessitated a move towards capitalism.

**The base and superstructure model**

Within Marx's dialectical account of history is the idea that a given individual's social being is determined by larger political and economic forces. Marx writes that **"it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines consciousness."**(good quote to use at beginning of defence) Simply stated, the social class into which a person is born determines her outlook and viewpoints.

Marx then expands this concept of determination into one of the central concepts of Marxism--that of base and superstructure. The base is the economic system on which the superstructure rests; cultural activities--such as philosophy or literature--belong in the superstructure. To Marxist critics, a society's economic base determines the interests and styles of its literature; it is this relationship between determining base and determined superstructure that is the main point of interest for Marxist critics.

**Ideology**

Marx believes that because the superstructure is determined by the base, it inevitably supports the ideologies of the base. Ideologies are the changing ideas, values, and feelings through which individuals experience their societies. They present the dominant ideas and values as the beliefs of society as a whole, thus preventing individuals from seeing how society actually functions. Literature, as a cultural production, is a form of ideology, one that legitimizes the power of the ruling class. How does the poem reinforce a class hierarchy? Who is the boy working for? To what extent is the boy a victim of the buzz saw which may symbolise technological advancement or industrialisation? In the eighteenth century, for example, literature was used by the English upper classes both to express and transmit the dominant value systems to the lower classes.

**Georg Lukacs and the Social Realists**

There is a great deal of difference in opinion among Marxist literary critics concerning the relationship between ideology and literature. Since Marx's own writing, theorists such as the Soviet social realists, Georg Lukacs, and Louis Althusser have gradually modified or expanded on Marx's original concepts. The Soviet socialist realists believe that because ideology is part of the superstructure, it must correspond to the economic base of society. In their view, literature inevitably reflects the economic base; there is no way that it can function outside of the strict base/superstructure model. Like the social realists, the critic Georg Lukacs feels that only realistic forms of fiction are artistically and politically valid. But Lukacs and the social realists have a limited perspective. They both fail to recognize that there are legitimate works which fall outside such a literal reading of the base/superstructure model.

It is doubtful that Marx and Engels themselves took such a deterministic approach to literature. In their work, literature is not merely a passive reflection of the economic base. Although they conceded that literature cannot change society, or base, in itself, they suggested that literature can be an active element in such change.

**Antonio Gramsci**

The Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci , with his concept of hegemony, allows for an even more flexible reading of the base/superstructure model. Gramsci believes that ideology alone cannot explain the extent to which people are willing to accept dominant values. He also realizes, along with many other Marxist critics, that the base/superstructure model is much too rigid to account for cultural productions which do not simply reinforce those dominant values.

In a way, Gramsci's notion of hegemony is a continuation of the concepts behind ideology. **Hegemony is a sort of deception in which the individual forgets his own desires and accepts dominant values as their own. (To what extent is the boy forgoing his own freedom to be a child because he accepts, without question, the dominant value of work?)**  For example, someone might think that going to college is the right and necessary step in every life, when in reality their belief is socially constructed. Literature, then, may be seen as something that both reinforces dominant values and occasionally calls them into question. For example, nineteenth century women writers of sentimental fiction used certain narrative conventions merely to reinforce dominant values, whereas a writer like Jane Austen used many of the same conventions to undermine the same dominant values.

**Louis Althusser**

The French theorist Louis Althusser considers the relationship between literature and ideology . For him, this also includes an understanding of hegemony. Althusser suggests that ideology and hegemony, like literature, present a constructed version of reality, one which does not necessarily reflect the actual conditions of life. Thus, literature neither merely reflects ideology, nor can it be reduced to it. Literature may be situated within ideology, but it can also distance itself from ideology--thereby allowing the reader to gain an awareness of the ideology on which it is based. **For example, a novel may present the world in a way that seems to support dominant ideologies, but as a work of fiction it also reveals those ideologies**. So, once again, although literature itself cannot change society, it can be an active part of such changes.

**Central Marxist concepts**

Although Marxist critics have interpreted Marx's theories in several different ways, as Marxists they eventually return to a few central Marxist concepts: the dialectical model of history ; the notion that social being determines consciousness; and the base/superstructure model . For instance, the English critic Raymond Williams uses such terms as residual and emergent cultures to modify the base/superstructure model, not to question it. Similarly, terms like hegemony , which are not a part of Marx's theories, are used by critics to allow a greater application of Marxist concepts.

**Marxism and literature**

Marxist literary critics tend to look for tensions and contradictions within literary works. This is appropriate because Marxism was originally formulated to analyze just such tensions and contradictions within society. Marxist literary critics also see literature as intimately linked to social power, and thus their analysis of literature is linked to larger social questions. Since Marxism is a belief system which can be used to analyze society at the grandest or most detailed level, Marxist literary criticism is ultimately part of a much larger effort to uncover the inner workings of society.

**Marxism and other theories**

Marxist literary criticism may be thought of as a reaction to many of the rigid theories of the New Critics. Unlike the New Critics, who saw the text as a self-contained whole, Marxists generally focus upon the unresolved tensions within works of literature.

Similarly, although Marxist criticism has both influenced and been influenced by structuralist criticism and post- structuralist criticism , it greatly differs from them in its refusal to separate literature and language from society. Marxist criticism is materialist, so it has more in common with theories that focus upon how literature functions within social, political, and economic structures, than it does with theories that focus only upon the text. Marxist criticism has had an enormous influence on feminism , new historicism , and most recently, cultural studies .

As a system that looks for causes beneath the surface of society, Marxist criticism has much in common with psychoanalytic criticism . In fact, it is possible to make a rough comparison between the Marxist model of base and superstructure and the Freudian model of unconscious and conscious.

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This book is a very clear introduction to the application of Marx's theories to the study of literature.

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This book describes many types of literary theory; and its chapter on Marxist theory is a good introduction.

Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

In this book, Williams tries to modify many of the basic concepts of Marxism to allow for a more complex reading of literature.

**Ideology/Marxism: A Brief Guide**

Ideology is a term developed in the Marxist tradition to talk about how cultures are structured in ways that enable the group holding power to have the maximum control with the minimum of conflict. This is not a matter of groups *deliberately* planning to oppress people or alter their consciousness (although this can happen), but rather a matter of how the dominant institutions in society work through values, conceptions of the world, and symbol systems, in order to legitimize the current order. Briefly, this legitimization is managed through the widespread teaching (the social adoption) of ideas about the way things are, how the world 'really' works and should work. These ideas (often embedded in symbols and cultural practices) orient people's thinking in such a way that they accept the current way of doing things, the current sense of what is 'natural,' and the current understanding of their roles in society. This socialization process, the shaping of our cognitive and affective interpretations of our social world, is called, by Gramsci, "hegemony;" it is carried out, Althusser writes, by the state ideological apparatuses -- by the churches, the schools, the family, and through cultural forms (such as literature, rock music, advertising, sitcoms, etc.) To what extent do the characters in the poem unquestioningly accept their roles and the necessity to work physically hard, despite the dangers, in order to survive? If you accept that the family are working for a ‘boss’, then they have accepted their working class stature as being natural and normal.

While the concept of ideology is most generally associated with power relations, we have to keep from being too simplistic. Power is not a unitary force or phenomenon, nor an exclusively 'political' phenomenon. Power and power relations are woven throughout all our practices and ideas -- power is exercised in every relationship, group, and social practice, and it is not necessarily detrimental (what if a mother decided she did not want to operate in a power relationship to her newborn?). On the other hand, one must not forget that social order relies, in varying degrees, but ultimately, on the ability of one person or group to coerce another person or group, and that the basis of Law, however rationalized, is the authorized use of force. (WM)

Some conceptions of ideology de-emphasize the power aspect and see ideology as the structure of assumptions which form the imaginative world of groups. Ideology, writes Althusser, is "a representation of the imaginary relation of individuals to the real condition of existence." Further, Althusser writes, ideology creates us as persons: it "hails" us, calls us into being. How has the boy been hailed or interpellated into the discourse of work within a capitalist paradigm?

According to Marx, ideology naturalizes, it historicizes, and it eternalizes. That is,

1. ideological structures appear to be natural, "according to the order of things" (naturalization);

2. ideological structures appear to be the logical conclusion to an historical development (historicization);

3. there is an assumption that now that this (natural) state of affairs has been reached, things will be that way, barring regression (eternalization).

E.g. "Democracy is the political system most in keeping with the nature and needs of humans; history has been an evolution of political forms towards democracy; once states have all reached democracy, all they have to do is avoid reverting, there is no 'farther' to go in terms of political organization." We *assume* that democracy is the political system best suited to the nature and aspirations of humans, we see history as a movement towards democracy, we assume that once all nations have achieved democracy they will continue to be democracies forever, unless they erode. These assumptions are ideology.

Any ideology will contain contradictions, will repress aspects of experience, will 'disappear' that which tends to contradict it or expose its repressions. Ideology's cultural activity will include the construction of pseudo-problems which are given pseudo-solutions -- e.g. our culture's obsession with stories about 'love' relations which are 'solved' by individuals realizing the true worth of the other, as if these issues were really central to our most fundamental human concerns, our moral and mental health, the justice and equity for which the world is calling out; all sorts of moral and social problems get 'disappeared' in the process.

**Ideological analysis: some questions to ask of the text**

1. What are the assumptions about what is natural, just and right?

2. What (and who) do these assumptions distort or obscure?

3. What are the power relations? How are they made to appear as if they are normal or good? What negative aspects are excluded?

4. Look for binaries, oppositions (good/evil, natural/unnatural, tame/wild, young/old). Which term of the binary is privileged, what is repressed or devalued by this privileging of one term over the other?

5. What people, classes, areas of life, experiences, are 'left out', silenced?

6. What cultural assumptions and what 'myths' shape experience and evaluation? (Is the boy representative of a rural myth of masculinity? Is he part of a bildungsroman or ‘growing up’ myth – a boy on the cusp of manhood?)) What is mystified (e.g. a pastoral setting for cigarette smokers, a gentle rocking chair in a lovely room for motherhood)? I use "myth", also known as "second-order signification," in the sense in which it is used by Roland Barthes: as a sign which refers to a broad, general cultural meaning; see his *Mythologies*. An experience or event or thing is mystified when a broad cultural meaning obscures the particulars of that experience, event or thing; this obscuring usually covers up or 'disappears' contrary or inconvenient facts, as in the examples I have given. (For example, the myth of young boy learning to be a man, taking risks, being outside etc. obscures the dangers he faces, the inequity in labour sharing (what is the boss or the sister doing?)To demystify, pay attention to the particulars, the specifics, the concrete reality, with all its blemishes and contradictions.

7. What enthymemes can you see in the 'logic' of the text? In a general sense, enthymemes are statements which exclude the expression of key assumptions which ground conclusions -- e.g. "Karen studies really hard. She'll ace this exam for sure" Unspoken assumption: What it takes (all it takes?) to 'ace' an examination is hard study.

8. How does the style of presentation contribute to the meaning of the text? Style always contains meaning.

9. What 'utopic kernel', that is, vision of human possibility, appears to lie at the heart of the understanding of the ideology? The assumption is that there will be some vision of the good that drives that ideological perspective's imagination of the world. The invited reading of the poem seems to suggest that human beings need to accept death/mortality and move on (within a capitalist discourse focused on work). Work is good, an end in itself and a means to survival and acceptance. Returning to work also helps repress the memory of the death and of the loved one.)

## Marxism and Ideology

This next unit of theory is entitled "Ideology and Discourse." The theorists we're examining--Marx, Volosinov, Althusser, Bakhtin, and Foucault--are discussing how ideology works, and how ideologies construct subjects. All of these theorists are coming from a Marxist perspective, using ideas and terms developed in Marxist theory. So to start off, I want to talk a bit about some basic ideas of Marxist theory.

Marxism is a set of theories, or a system of thought and analysis, developed by Karl Marx in the nineteenth century in response to the Western industrial revolution and the rise of industrial capitalism as the predominant economic mode. Like feminist theory, Marxist theory is directed at social change; Marxists want to analyze social relations in order to change them, in order to alter what they see are the gross injustices and inequalities created by capitalist economic relations. My capsule summary of the main ideas of Marxism, however, will focus on the theoretical aspects more than on how that theory has been and is applicable to projects for social change.

As a theory, Marxism is pretty complicated. You can think of Marxism as being three types of theory in one: philosophy, history, and economics. First, Marxism is a philosophical movement; Marx's ideas about human nature, and about how we know and function in the world come from traditions articulated by Hegel, Feuerbach, Kant, and other German philosophers. All of these guys, including Marx, are interested in the relation between materialist and idealist philosophy. As a philosopher, Marx helps create and define a branch of philosophy called DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM.

Materialism in general is the branch of Western philosophy from which science (Aristotelian or Newtonian) comes. Materialist philosophy is based on empiricism, on the direct observation of measurable or observable phenomena; materialist philosophy is interested in studying how the human mind, via the senses, perceives external reality, and particularly with the idea of how we know things "objectively," without the interference of emotions or preconceived ideas about things. Materialist philosophy often wants to ask how we know something is real, or, more specifically, how we know that what is real IS real, and not the product of our mental processes (which are subjective).

The "dialectical" part of "dialectical materialism" comes from the Greek idea of "dialogue," which means to argue. Marx's view of the idea of "dialectic" comes from Hegel, who thought that no ideas, social formations, or practices were ever eternal or fixed, but were always in motion or flux (something like Derrida's "play"). Hegel said that this motion or flux or change happens in a certain pattern, which he called a "dialectic." Hegel says, change occurs as the result of a struggle between two opposed forces, which then get resolved into a third entity. Hegel's model of change looks like this: you start with a proposition or a position, which he calls a "thesis;" the thesis then stands in opposition to another position, which he calls the "antithesis" (and thus far it does work like our old friend the binary opposition). But then the struggle between thesis and antithesis is resolved into a third position, or set of ideas or practices, which Hegel calls the "synthesis." Then, of course, the synthesis eventually becomes a thesis, with an antithesis, and the whole process starts over. But that, says Hegel, is how change happens--by the continual struggle between thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

In addition to being a kind of philosophy, Marxism is also a way to understand history. In this sense, Marxism belongs to a kind of historicism called HISTORICAL MATERIALISM, which shows that history, or social change, occurs via *human* forces, and not because of God, destiny, or some unknown non-human force that shapes events. Historical materialism is "materialist" because it is interested in how humans have created *material culture*, i.e. tools, objects, the material things that we use to live our lives every day, and in how this material culture has formed the basis for historical change.

The historical materialist view of history thus holds that the moving forces of social organizations--the forces that make change, that make "history"--are people and their tools, and the work that people do with these tools; the tools are often referred to as "instruments of production," or as "forces of production." The buzz saw! Historical materialism also says that human labour (people and how they use their tools) always has a social character. People live in social groups, not in isolation, and they always organize their social groups in some way (having some form of "government," e.g.). What every social group organizes, according to the historical materialist perspective, is how people work with their tools, or, in other words, how human labor, and forces of production, operate. The organizations that shape how people use their tools (the forces of production) are called the "relations of production." The relations of production (how people relate to each other, and to their society as a whole, through their productive activity) and the forces of production (the tools, and methods for using tools, and the workers available to use these tools) together form what historical materialism calls a MODE OF PRODUCTION. You could describe this relationship between people and their tools as it is depicted in the poem.

As a historian, Marx identifies five basic historical developments or changes in the mode of production: the primitive community, the slave state, the feudal state, capitalism, and socialism. I won't go into detail about this history, but let me point out a couple of examples. In a slave state, some people are owned and some are the owners; the owned people are the ones that labor, and the owners reap the benefit of that labor. Within the slave "mode of production," the organization of labor and productivity governs virtually all facets of social organization, even those not directly related to labor, such as religion or even aesthetics. The Southern United States in the first half of the nineteenth century stand as a good example of Marx's idea of a slave state: it's easy to see how all aspects of southern culture, including religious beliefs and art, upheld and justified the slave system that was at the heart of the southern economy.

Marx sees capitalism as a mode of production emerging from feudalism (which is how labor and life were organized during the medieval period in Europe). He focuses on capitalism as an unequal mode of production, one which exploits workers, just as the slave state exploited slaves. According to Marx, this inequality is a fundamental aspect of capitalism, and needs to be changed (through dialectical struggle). Eventually, Marx says, the internal tensions and contradictions of capitalism (which will create an endless series of theses and antitheses and syntheses) will eventually destroy capitalism, and capitalism will evolve into socialism. Socialism, for Marx, is the end result of all this economic evolution/history: socialism would be a utopian mode of production, and would then just remain forever (without evolving into something else). This would pretty much be the end of history, or change, as we have known it.

Which leads us to a third dimension of Marxism. Marxism is an economic theory or doctrine, an analysis of how capitalism as an economic system operates. It's based on an analysis of how the forces and relations of production work. In a factory, for instance, a worker performs labor on raw materials, and thus transforms those raw materials into an object; in the process, the laborer adds something to the raw materials so that the object (raw material + labor) is worth more than the original raw material. What the laborer adds is called "surplus value," in Marxist theory. While the laborer is paid for the work he or she does, that payment is figured in terms of "reproduction", of what the laborer will need in order to come back the next day (i.e. food, rest, shelter, clothes, etc.), and not in terms of what value the laborer added to the raw material. The goal of capitalist production is to sell the object made, with its surplus value, for more than the cost of the raw materials and the reproduction of the laborer. This excess in value (in price) comes from the surplus value added by the laborer, but it is "owned" by the capitalist; the factory owner gets the profit from selling the object, and the laborer gets only the cost of his/her "reproduction" in the wages s/he earns. You could relate some of this to the boy’s role as labourer.

These relations of production, where the labourer does the work and the owner gets the profit from the surplus value created by the labourer, create two social classes, according to Marx: the proletariat, which consists of the workers who have to sell their labour power in order to survive, and the owners of the means of production, or capitalists. There is also a third class in the capitalist mode of production, a middle class, called the bourgeoisie, who do not sell their labour power directly, but who provide services (for the labourers and the capitalists)--merchants, doctors, teachers, etc. --and who identify themselves with the capitalists, and uphold their interests, rather than with the proletariat.

For Marxists, history--or social change--thus occurs through the struggle (the dialectical struggle) between the two classes, the proletariat and the capitalists. (The bourgeoisie mostly get counted with the capitalists in terms of identification, even though the bourgeoisie don't own the means of production and don't get the profits created by surplus value).

From these economic relations comes a crucially important concept in Marxist thought: the idea of **ALIENATION.** There are two aspects to the Marxist idea of alienation. The first is that labor which produces surplus value is alienated labor. The labor put into an object becomes part of the capitalist's profit, and thus no longer belongs to the laborer. In addition to alienating the laborer from his or her labor power, capitalism also forces the worker to become alienated from him or herself. When a worker has to sell her/his labor power, s/he becomes a COMMODITY, (the boy) something to be sold in the marketplace like a thing; the worker who is a commodity is thus not fully human, in the philosophical sense, since s/he cannot exercise free will to determine her/his actions. (Yes, this part is coming from a humanist model, where people still have free will to govern their actions). The worker who is forced to exist as a commodity in the labor market is ALIENATED from her/his humanness; in selling one's labor, that labor becomes alienated, something separate from or other than the laborer, something divided from the person that produces it.

The double alienation of the proletariat, and their exploitation by the capitalists, form the basic contradictions of capitalism which produce the dialectic (the struggle between workers and owners, labor and capital) which produces social change, or history, and which will eventually synthesize into socialism.

From Marx's economic doctrines comes an analysis of how the capitalist system specifically functions; from historical materialism comes a model of how social organizations are structured, which is relevant to all cultures, whether capitalist or not. According to the Marxist view of culture, the economic relations--forces and relations of production, or modes of production--are the primary determining factor in all social relations: everything that happens in a society is in some way related to, and determined by, the mode of production, also called the ECONOMIC BASE (or just "base"). This idea, that the economic organization of a social group is primary and determinant, is a fundamental premise of Marxist thought.

The economic base (the relations and forces of production) in any society generates other social formations, called the SUPERSTRUCTURE. The superstructure consists of all other kinds of social activities or systems, including politics, religion, philosophy, morality, art, and science (etc.). All of these aspects of a society are, in Marxist theory, determined by (i.e. shaped, formed, or created by) the economic base. Thus a central question for a lot of Marxist theory is *how* does the economic base determine superstructure? How, for instance, does the feudal mode of production produce or determine the religious beliefs and practices current during the medieval period?

Another way of asking this question is to look at the relations between economic base and a particular aspect of superstructure, which Marxists name IDEOLOGY. Ideology, or ideologies, are the ideas that exist in a culture; there will typically be one or several kinds of religious ideologies, for example, and political ideologies, and aesthetic ideologies, which will articulate what, and how, people can think about religion, politics, and art, respectively. Ideology is how a society thinks about itself, the forms of social consciousness that exist at any particular moment; ideologies supply all the terms and assumptions and frameworks that individuals use to understand their culture, and ideologies supply all the things that people believe in, and then act on.

For Marx, ideology, as part of the superstructure generated by an economic base, works to justify that base; the ideologies present in a capitalist society will explain, justify, and support the capitalist mode of production. Again, the example of slavery in nineteenth-century US culture is useful: the economic base of that society was slavery, and all productive labor and economic relations were structured by the master/slave relation; all of the superstructures, such as organized religion, local and national politics, and art (especially literature), worked to uphold slavery as a good economic system.

Literature, then, is part of any culture's superstructure, from this perspective, and is determined (in both form and content) by the economic base. Literature also participates in the articulation of forms of cultural ideology--novels and poems (et al.) might justify or attack religious beliefs, political beliefs, or aesthetic ideas (to use just these three examples of ideological formations). Marxist literary critics and theorists are interested in asking a range of questions about how literature functions as a site for ideology, as part of the superstructure. First, they want to examine how the economic base of any culture (and particularly of capitalist cultures) influences or determines the form and/or content of literature, both in general terms and in specific works of literature. They also want to look at how literature functions in relation to other aspects of the superstructure, particularly other articulations of ideology. Does literature reflect the economic base? If so, how? Does literature reflect other ideologies? If so, how? Do literary works create their own ideologies? If so, how are these ideologies related back to the economic base? And, finally, Marxist critics, like feminist critics, want to investigate how literature can work as a force for social change, or as a reaffirmation (or **"reification**," to use Marxist terminology) of existing conditions. Is literature part of the dialectical struggle that will end capitalism and bring about socialism, or is literature part of the bourgeois justification of capitalism?

Let me run through some of the ways Marxist critics have approached these questions about the social function of literature. We'll start by looking a little more closely at how ideology works, since literature is considered a subset of ideology.

According to Frederich Engels (Marx's pal), ideology functions as an illusion; ideologies give people ideas about how to understand themselves and their lives, and these ideas disguise or mask what's really going on. In Engels' explanation, ideologies signify the way people live out their lives in class society, giving people the terms for the values, ideas, and images that tie them to their social functions, and thus prevent them from a true understanding of the real forces and relations of production. Ideology is thus an illusion which masks the real/objective situation; an example of this would be an ideology that tells you, as a worker, that the capitalists are really working in your interest, which disguises or hides the "objective" reality that the capitalists' interests are opposed to the workers' interests. (Another example might be a politician, whose rhetoric in speeches--whose ideology--tries to persuade you that he's concerned with your tax situation, and this ideology keeps you from seeing how he's really only interested in protecting corporate tax shelters). Anyway, Engels says that the illusions created by ideology create **FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS** in people, who believe the ideological representations of how the world works and thus misperceive, or don't see at all, how the world really/objectively works (i.e. in terms of the mode of production and the class divisions that mode of production creates). Workers, for Engels, are deluded by various kinds of ideology into thinking they're not exploited by the capitalist system, instead of seeing how they are.

In this view, literature is also a kind of illusion, a kind of ideology that prevents people from seeing the real relations of production at work. From the viewpoint of what's now known as "vulgar" Marxism, all literature produces false consciousness, because all literature produced in a capitalist society could only reflect the capitalist ideologies. This view can't account for how or why literature might be able to challenge the ideological assumptions of a society because it can't acknowledge that literature (or other ideologies, for that matter) might be in opposition to the dominant formation of the economic base. In vulgar Marxism, you couldn't speak or think in ways that weren't entirely determined by the economic base.

For more recent Marxist critics, however, such "vulgar"` insistence that literature is absolutely determined by the economic base is abandoned in favor of a more complicated idea of how literature relates to economic formations. Rather than simply "reflecting" the values that support capitalism, Marxist critics argue, literature does something more complicated. According to Pierre Macheray, literature doesn't reflect either the economic base or other ideology, but rather it works on existing ideologies and transforms them, giving these ideologies new shape and structure; literature in Macheray's view is thus distinct from, distant from, other forms of ideology (like religious ideology), and thus can provide insights into how ideologies are structured, and what their limits are. This view is also followed by Georg Lukacs, who argues that Marxist literary criticism should look at a work of literature in terms of the ideological structure(s) of which it is a part, but which it transforms in its art.

For other Marxists, including Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, and Louis Althusser, literature works the way any ideology does, by signifying the imaginary ways in which people perceive the real world; literature uses language to signify what it feels like to live in particular conditions, rather than using language to give a rational analysis of those conditions. Thus literature helps to *create* experience, not just reflect it. As a kind of ideology, literature for these critics is relatively autonomous, both of other ideological forms and of the economic base. You can't trace one-to-one direct ties between literature and any particular ideology, or between literature and the economic base. (When you can, we call it bad literature; literature directly linked to an ideology we call "propaganda," for instance).

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### Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"

Althusser is a structuralist Marxist. This should make you ask, how can that be? How can you combine Marxism, which relies on social/historical analysis, with structuralism, which relies on a historical/asocial analysis? Althusser answers that initially with distinction between ideologies (historical/social) and ideology (structural).

This essay as it appears in *Critical Theory Since 1965* is an excerpt from a longer piece discussing the relation between the State and subjects. **Althusser is asking why subjects are obedient, why people follow the laws, and why isn't there a revolt/revolution against capitalism**. His view of ideology and ideologies comes out of his understanding of the relations between State and subject (between government and citizens), so it's worthwhile to examine those ideas for a minute.

**The State**, for Althusser, is the kind of governmental formation that arises with capitalism; a state (and you can substitute the word "nation" here to help conceptualize what the "State" is) is determined by the capitalist mode of production and formed to protect its interests. It is historically true (whether you are a Marxist or not) that the idea of nations as discrete units is coterminous with capitalism. It is also possible that democracy, as an ideology and/or a governmental form is also coterminous with capitalism, as democracy gives the "illusion" that all people are equal, and have equal power (and hence masks relations of economic exploitation).

Althusser mentions two major mechanisms for insuring that people within a State behave according to the rules of that State, even when it's not in their best interests (in regards to their class positions) to do so. The first is what Althusser calls the RSA, or Repressive State Apparatuses, that can enforce behavior directly, such as the police, and the criminal justice and prison system. Through these "apparatuses" the state has the power to force you physically to behave. More importantly for literary studies, however, are the second mechanism Althusser investigates, which he calls ISAs, or Ideological State Apparatuses. These are institutions which generate ideologies which we as individuals (and groups) then internalize, and act in accordance with. These ISAs include schools, religions, the family, legal systems, politics, arts, sports, etc. (as listed in the footnote on p.239). These organizations generate systems of ideas and values, which we as individuals believe (or don't believe); this is what Althusser examines. How do we come to internalize, to believe, the ideologies that these ISAs create, (and thus misrecognize or misrepresent ourselves as unalienated subjects in capitalism) Althusser's answer starts with the distinction between ideologies and ideology. IDEOLOGIES are specific, historical, and differing; we can talk about various ideologies, such as Christian ideology, democratic ideology, feminist ideology, Marxist ideology, etc. IDEOLOGY, however, is STRUCTURAL. Althusser says that ideology is a structure, and as such is "eternal," i.e. to be studied synchronically; this is why Althusser says (on p. 240) that ideology has no history. He derives this idea of ideology as a structure from the Marxist idea that ideology is part of the superstructure, but he links the structure of ideology to the idea of the unconscious, from Freud and from Lacan. Because ideology is a structure, its contents will vary, you can fill it up with anything, but its form, like the structure of the unconscious, is always the same. And ideology works "unconsciously." Like language, ideology is a structure/system which we inhabit, which speaks us, but which gives us the illusion that we're in charge, that we freely chose to believe the things we believe, and that we can find lots of reasons why we believe those things.

Althusser's first premise or thesis (p. 241a, in italics) is that "Ideology is a 'representation' of the Imaginary Relationship of Individuals to their Real conditions of existence." He begins his explanation of this pronouncement by looking at why people need this imaginary relation to real conditions of existence. Why not just understand the real?(p. 241b).

The first answer to this question, Althusser says, comes from the 18th century, and the idea that ideology comes from priests and despots. This is basically a conspiracy theory, which says that a handful of powerful men fooled the populace into believing these (falsified) representations/ideas about the world. (This is the eighteenth-century version of what I've said about feminism: that the men all got together one day and invented sexism, and the women were fooled by it).

The second (and, from the Marxist perspective, the correct) answer is that the material alienation of real conditions predisposes people to form representations which distance (alienate) them from these real conditions. In other words, the material relations of capitalist production are themselves alienating, but people can't quite deal with the harsh reality of this, so they make up stories about how the relations of production aren't so bad; (e.g. the poem asks us to accept an industrial accident and move on just as the other people in the poem do.) these stories, or representations, then alienate them further from the real (alienating) conditions. The double distancing involved here, or the alienation of alienation, works like an analgesic, a pill, to keep us from feeling pain of alienation; if we didn't have these stories, we'd know the alienation of the real relations of production, and we'd probably revolt--or go nuts.

These ideas about representation and reality assume that what is reflected in the imaginary representation of the world found in ideology is the "real world," or real conditions of existence. Althusser says that ideology doesn't represent the real world per se, but human beings' RELATION to that real world, to their perceptions of the real conditions of existence. In fact, we probably can't know the real world directly; what we know are always representations of that world, or representations of our relation to that world. Ideology then is the imaginary version, the represented version, the stories we tell ourselves about our relation to the real world.

So the "real world" becomes, not something that is objectively out there, but something that is the product of our relations to it, and of the ideological representations we make of it--the stories we tell ourselves about what is real become what is real. That's how ideology operates.

In more Marxist terms, what ideology does is present people with representations of their relations to relations of production, rather than with representations of the relations of production themselves.

Marxism originally formulated ideology as an illusionary representation of the relations of people to real conditions. For example: my real condition, as a professor, is that of a "cultural worker," someone paid to perform intellectual labor in teaching. My salary is not nearly as large as that of a doctor, lawyer, movie star, or athlete (not even in minor league baseball!!). What might be considered my "exploitation," or my "real" economic conditions, are "masked" with an ideology--that teaching and being a college professor is of high moral/social value, if not of high economic value, that the rewards of teaching are immaterial, that I get social status and respect (instead of money) for being the repository of knowledge, etc. That's one notion of ideology: it keeps me happy, thinking that I am really an important person, when the real conditions of my economic existence show how relatively unimportant I am. I buy into that ideology (that being a professor is important), and am therefore willing to tolerate my exploitation (and my alienation from the products of my own mental labor, i.e. the surplus intellectual value I create in you) by believing that I get "other" rewards besides money for doing this job. (How could you apply this example to the economic reality of the boy?)

Althusser says, by contrast, that my ideology is an illusion, but it's an illusion, or an imaginary understanding, not of the relations of production themselves, but of my relation to them. Thus I think I'm cool because I'm not working in a factory, and I think I'm smarter than factory workers because I assume that factory workers aren't very bright, or they wouldn't be working in factories. The relations of production here are in assuming that factory workers lack education (that relations of production have structured a relationship between job and education); my relation to that relation of production is to feel superior to it. That's what Althusser says is ideology. Althusser's Thesis II appears on p. 242b: "Ideology has a material existence." It's important for Marxists always to be grounding their analysis in material practices, material relations (since Marxism is, after all, grounded in dialectical materialism)--so if we want to talk about IDEAS, we need to be able to talk about them as MATERIAL (so that we don't lapse into idealism, or an argument that ideas are more "real" than material objects). So, what Althusser does to assert that ideology is material is to say that ideology always exists in two places--in an apparatus or practice (such as a ritual, or other forms of behavior dictated by the specific ideology) and in a subject, in a person--who is, by definition, material. Note the insistence on the material in the italicized quote on 243.

On p. 244, Althusser says that ideology, as material practice, depends on the notion of the subject. Hence the two theses on 244: "there is no practice except by and in an ideology" and "there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects". In short, there are no belief systems, and no practices determined by those belief systems, unless there is someone believing in them and acting on those beliefs.

Hence the final part of Althusser's argument: How is it that individual subjects are constituted in ideological structures? Or, in other words, how does ideology create a notion of self or subject?

All ideology has the function of constituting concrete individuals as subjects--of enlisting them in any belief system, according to Althusser. That's the main thing ideology as structure and ideologies as specific belief systems do--get people (subjects) to believe in them. There are three main points that Althusser makes about this process of becoming subjects-in-ideology.

1. We are born into subject-hood--if only because we're named before we're born; hence we're always-already subjects.

2. We are always-already subjects in ideology, in specific ideologies, which we inhabit, and which we recognize only as truth or obviousness. Everybody else's beliefs are recognizable as ideological, i.e. imaginary/illusory, whereas ours are simply true. Think, for example, about different religious beliefs. Everybody who believes in their religion thinks their religion is true, and everyone else's is just illusion, or ideology.

3. How does ideology (as structure) get us to become subjects, and hence not to recognize our subject positions within any particular ideological formation? How do we come to believe that our beliefs are simply true, not relative? Althusser answers this on 245b with the notion of **INTERPELLATION**. Ideology INTERPELLATES individuals as subjects. The word "interpellation" comes from the same root as the word "appellation," which means a name; it's not the same as the mathematical idea of "interpolation." Interpellation is a hailing, according to Althusser. A particular ideology says, in effect, HEY YOU--and we respond ME? You mean me?? And the ideology says, yes, I mean you. (The boy has been interpellated by capitalist/work ideology.)

You can see examples of this every day in commercials. I saw one the other night for a home gym system, claiming that "this machine will give you the kind of workout you desire, meeting your needs better than any other home gym." Each instance of "you" in that ad was an interpellation--the ad seeming to address ME PERSONALLY (in order to get me to see myself as the "you" being addressed, and hence to become a subject within its little ideological structure). This is also what Mr. Rogers does, when he looks sincerely into the camera and says "yes, I mean you." It also happens in the Uncle Sam recruiting posters which say "I want YOU for the Army."

Althusser makes some final points about ideology working this way to "hail" us as subjects, so that we think these ideas are individually addressed to us, and hence are true. He says that ideology, as structure, requires not only subject but Subject. In using the capital S, he invokes an idea similar to that of Lacan (whom Althusser studied and wrote about), that there is a small-s subject, the individual person, and a capital S Subject, which is the structural possibility of subjecthood (which individuals fill). The idea of subject and Subject also suggests the duality of being a subject, where one is both the subject OF language/ideology (as in being the subject of a sentence) and subject TO ideology, having to obey its rules/laws, and behave as that ideology dictates.

The interpellated subject in the ideology of the home gym commercial would thus order the gym, behave as if bodybuilding or rigorous exercise was a necessity, something of central importance. The Subject here would be some notion of physical perfection, or body cult, the rules that the subject is subjected to. Althusser uses the example of Christian religious ideology, with God as the ultimate Subject--the center of the system/structure.

On p. 248 Althusser links his ideas about ideology to Lacan directly, noting that the structure of ideology is specular (like Lacan's Imaginary, like the mirror stage).

There are a couple of things worth noting about Althusser as a "bricoleur" of other theorists. Althusser was enchanted by Freud, and even more enchanted by Lacan; the ideas of the imaginary, the mirror, the specular, and the subject/Subject are all gotten from or parallel to Lacanian notions. Also, as a Marxist, Althusser privileges SCIENCE as a form of knowing that is outside of any ideological structure, a type of knowledge that really IS simply true, because objective and material--hence his comment on 246 that the only way to know when ideology is ideological is through scientific knowledge.

Is this theory useful to literature? Yes, because it enables us to talk about how a literary text, as a subset or transformation or production of ideology (or of specific ideological formations) also constitutes us as subjects, and speaks to us directly. The most obvious form of how a literary text might interpellate us as subjects is one that uses direct address, when the text says "dear reader" (as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* does with annoying frequency). All texts interpellate readers by some mechanism, in some ways; all texts create subject positions for readers, whether that construction of subject positions is obvious or not. We will look at this idea of subject positions within literary texts further with Foucault.

**Representations of Class Structure in Literature (VHA 6)**

“No culture is homogeneous but contains a range of diverse, sometimes competing ideologies and discourses. Some of these ideological and discursive clashes are regularly played out in the textual representations of the culture,” (QSA Syllabus, 2004) and often lead to the emergence of dominant and subordinate ideologies.

Interestingly, contemporary literary theorists seem to concur that all texts are partial, that is, they provide an incomplete view of the world and in doing so seek to promote certain viewpoints and marginalise others. The genre, function and possible meanings of texts are shaped by the ideologies and discourses contained within. Hence, this thesis seeks to prove that these very ideologies which underpin cultural texts are vehicles of power which allow bourgeois society to maintain its domination over the masses and allow the world view of this group to appear to be “universal” and “natural.” Through the application of Marxist literary criticism, and an analysis of my chosen texts, namely Khaled Hossenini’s novel The Kite Runner and the film, Gosford Park I will seek to highlight the inequitable nature of cultural texts.

Marxism concerns itself with the notion that the way we view the world is determined largely by the way the economy is organised. Furthermore, Marxist literary criticism concerns itself with, “not what the text says but what the text hides.” (Eagleton, 1996) More specifically, Marxism seeks to identify how ideology works in literature to mask social contradictions - such as those between different economic groups in a society- through the privileging of the beliefs of one group in society over another. In Marxist usage, and indeed for the purposes of this task, ideology is not deemed to be a set of beliefs or assumptions that an individual is aware of, but it is rather that which makes the reader experience the world in a certain “universal” way “by presenting what is artificial as natural and harmonious” (Hans Bertens, 2001). For Marxists the ideologies which underpin cultural texts legitimatise ruling class domination. This is accomplished by the ideologies at work within the texts aspiring to portray a total or universal description of the world, one which makes it appear as if the perspective of the ruling group is applicable to everyone. Ergo, any contrary perspectives appear like incongruous departures from the norm and so reality is distorted. It is these marginalised perspectives that the text must suppress in order to maintain a coherent and consistent world view.

While Marxist criticism is rooted in the critiques of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, more recently Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramasci have risen to prominence as the more contemporary Marxist theorists and it is Althusser’s theory of the Ideological State Apparatus and Gramasci’s theory of hegemony which will be predominately explored in this thesis. Both theorists hold that it is the concept of ideology which is the primary rationale which leads to the “consent given by the great masses of a population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (Hans Bertens, 2001). Consent is historically assented to be due to the perception of prestige held by the lower classes in regard to the upper echelons of society.

By applying Althusser’s and Gramasci theories, the underlying ideologies in both the Kite Runner and Gosford Park can be identified, as can the individuals who do not hold social power and who are consequently marginalised. Hence the inequitable nature of both texts is highlighted. At the crux of Khaled Hosseini’s novel, The Kite Runner is the story of two young Afghan boys growing up in the 1970s. Amir is the son of a wealthy and respected merchant and Hassan is his servant and it is this relationship which showcases the inherent differences between the upper echelons of society and the masses. Amir, as a member of the upper class is portrayed as one who seems to have an inherent belief in his natural superiority and often exploits the benefits of his position. He is depicted as somewhat of a piteous coward, vainly struggling to win the respect of his detached and disinterested father. Hassan, depicted as a simpleton does not seem to harbour any of Amir’s human failings but as the novel progresses it becomes discernible that the invited reading is to ultimately view Amir as the true hero of the text. The dominant ideology operating within the novel is akin to this reading of the protagonists and is indeed one which is prevalent most capitalist cultures, that those who are rich are always superior – morally and intellectually, to the poor. This often becomes the dominant ideology within a society as “culture is a form of superstructure” (Hans Bertens, 2001) which articulates the interests and ideologies of those who control the economy of a society. This concept is further delineated when Amir and his father are forced to flee Afghanistan just prior to the Russian Occupation. Although previously wealthy, upon arriving in America they are virtually destitute and as impoverished foreigners receive little respect or assistance.

“They think I’m a thief and a beggar!” (Hosseini, 2003) Thus, no longer a part of the group which controls the economic power base within American society, power has shifted away from Amir and his father, further cementing the dominant ideology of the superiority of the wealthy.

The dominance of this ideology is an “effect which is generated through a text’s textual structure and reading practices,” (Moon, 2004) and so it is conceivable that binary oppositions are present. Binary oppositions “often create and reveal meaning through the hierarchal difference between the terms of the pair.” (Moon, 2001) The privileging of one set of binaries depends on the marginalisation of the other. Whereas the binary of the rich in the text is attached to a positive value, a negative value is attached to the poor and it is these oppositions which translate into cultural beliefs and acts which mobilize the stated dominant ideology contained within Hosseini’s novel.

Marxism seeks to determine how “texts advance certain class ideologies allowing those who hold the economic power to dominate the masses,” (Barry, 2002) and to this end the underlying ideologies in The Kite Runner play a significant role. Hegemony, a theory developed by Antonio Gramasci maintains that bourgeois society achieves this domination over the masses by advancing and naturalising the ideology that the subordinate groups within a society will achieve fulfilment by allowing their own interests to emulate the interests of those who control the economy. Ergo, the “poor will best serve themselves by serving the rich, allowing the rich to become richer while the poor remain poor” (Hans Bertens, 2001). By applying Gramasci’s theory to the text it becomes evident that the upper echelons of Afghan society to which Amir and this father belong do not dominate through physical force but rather through this notion of hegemony. Hassan adheres to this internalised form of social control orchestrated by those whose superior economic position affords them great power within the social hierarchy. His place as part of the impoverished serving social class is naturalized and so it hardly seems like a conscious view which he holds but it is rather “just the way things are” (Barry, 2002). “I wondered briefly what I must be like to live with such an ingrained sense of one’s place in the hierarchy” (Hosseini, 2003).

Within the text, as well as operating on an ideological level, hegemony is also catalysed on an intellectual level as within the Afghan culture the intellectual capacity of an individual is determined by their social class,

“That Hassan would grow up illiterate has been decided the moment he was born, perhaps even at the moment he was conceived – after all what use did a servant have for the written word?” (Hosseini, 2003) Ensuring that the masses remain illiterate is just another form of social control, allowing the dominant class within a society to impose a general direction on social life by “defining customs and ways of thinking and acting” (Makaryk, 1993) and hence suffusing its world view throughout a given society. By identifying the individuals who do hold the social power and characters who are motivated by ideologies contained in the text, those who are marginalised can be revealed, hence highlighting the inequitable nature of texts.

Moreover, for Althusser the underlying ideologies of cultural texts work through the Ideological State Apparatuses which can include innumerable groupings such as organised religion, education, the law and political systems, all of which “foster an ideology –which is sympathetic to maintaining the social status quo” ( Barry, 2002). Furthermore, the ideologies cultivated within these groupings naturalize the superiority of bourgeois institutions, ideas and practices. What arises from the existence of the Ideological State Apparatus and is apparent in The Kite Runner is that the dominant ideologies within a society, in fact, impose a specific set of values upon the individual, “while allowing the individual to believe they are acting through their own free will” (Hans Bertens, 2001).

“I never thought of Hassan and me as friends. Never mind that we taught each other to ride a bicycle or that as kids we learnt to crawl together” (Hosseini, 2003). Hence the dominant ideology operating within the society influences the thoughts and beliefs of all individuals. The rigid class division within Afghanistan’s society is perceived by all its members to be the “harmonious” and “universal” way, while in reality the divisions are maintained through the artificial means of the Ideological State Apparatus. Although this mechanism works to maintain the social status quo in favour of Amir, even he is “as blind as everyone else as to its effects on his being” (Hans Bertens, 2001) and experiences the world in terms of these underlying ideologies preventing him and Hassan, despite the close proximity of their lives, from ever becoming truly friends. By naturalising these concepts a distorted world view is portrayed and then unconsciously accepted by the reader.

In regards to my other text, Gosford Park a similar approach as the one taken with The Kite Runner is applicable. Saussure saw texts “as objects constructed from a social system of signs,” (Moon, 2001) and it is through an analysis of these social signs that the underlying ideologies and values within a community can be identified. A strong indication as to underlying ideologies of the film, Gosford Park can be acquired through an analysis of the signs and signifiers. These take the form of visual images and figurative language, such as the constant shots of the servants’ quarters which are located downstairs, below those of the aristocracy and implies the differences in rank between the two social groups. Furthermore language such as

“The name’s Parkes, Robert Parkes,”

“Here you will be known as Mr Stockbridge” (Altman, 2001) highlights that in the film the servants are known by the name of those they serve, intrinsically conveying the notion that they are defined by their masters and thus are inferior and as individuals are of far less importance than their masters. It is these signs which aid in forming the opposing binaries enclosed within the text and help to privilege one over the other. From this, a relationship between the text and certain cultural beliefs can be established and it can be inferred that, although set nearly fifty years prior to The Kite Runner, the dominant ideologies in the film Gosford Park, set in Britain, are akin to those in Hosseini’s novel. Wealthy aristocracy are privileged over the working and serving classes in both texts. The film, formatted in the classic style of a whodunit murder mystery, showcases the divisions amongst the classes in the 1920s. “How many here had parents in service and was that why they chose to go into it?”

“I believe that applies to all of us save one Mr Denton” (Altman, 2001).

Althusser’s theory of Interpellation is closely linked to the idea of hegemony and envisages that “the individual is encouraged to see herself or himself as a free entity.” (Barry, 2003) In fact, such as in the case of the serving class in Gosford Park, each character is operating within the framework of the ideologies within their society so that they are confined to their rank and never seek to escape it as it is “merely the way in which things are done” (Hans Bertens, 2001) . By naturalising the superiority of the upper classes and restricting members of the community of lesser social standing to their lowly rank within the hierarchy through Interpellation, dominance is maintained over the masses and so a world view which is sympathetic to the underlying ideologies of society is preserved.

The ideologies working within the film further seek to “distort the true conditions of existence” (Hans Bertens, 2001) by alienating the character of Henry Denton. In Gosford Park, Henry Denton first appears as an unexceptional valet to a noted Hollywood director, arriving at the country manor for the hunting season along with the other guests. Nonetheless, as the movie progresses it is revealed that he is, in fact, an actor masquerading as a servant as part of his preparation for an upcoming role. Once this is revealed to the inhabitants of the manor, he is shunned by both the aristocracy and serving class.

“Why does everyone (servants) treat me as if I was one of those stupid snobs? I spent half the week downstairs with all of you?”

“You can’t play for both teams at once, Sir” (Altman, 2001).

Denton’s actions violate the social status quo of 20th century Britain maintained through the Ideological State Apparatus and as the ideologies at work within this society aspire to make it appear that the obdurate divisions among the classes are “natural”, his actions, which are contrary to the dominant ideology within the text, are presented to the reader to beerroneous departures from the norm and are so marginalised to maintain a consistent, but prejudiced world view.

Thus, an application of Marxist criticism not only reveals the dominant ideologies within the text but also validates the notion that ideologies which underpin cultural texts are vehicles of power which allow bourgeois society to maintain their domination over the masses and allow the world view of this group appear to be “universal” and “natural,” distorting the true social and cultural circumstances of the text. Although written in different eras, both The Kite Runner and Gosford Park espouse the same dominant ideologies and marginalise the serving class in order to maintain a coherent world vision which is ultimately sympathetic to maintaining the social and economic status quo within that given society.

Extended Written Response

**Applying Marxist and New Historicist theory to two poems by Robert Lowell, ‘Memories of West Street and Lepke’ and ‘Skunk Hour.’**

In task 3A, I proposed to explore how class discourses can be employed by an author in order to construct meaning about the stratification of society. I chose to focus on this particular topic because I wished to investigate the apparent connection between an author’s experiences and the views expressed in their work, especially within confessional poetry. An investigation such as this will ultimately yield an insight into the autobiographical experiences of the author and uncover how their personal opinions can sometimes distort a reader’s interpretation of a text. However, for this investigation to prove successful, we must recognize that any author is a ‘discursive construct,’ (Foucault, 1977) and are therefore a product of the discourses and ideologies in which they were immersed.

To aid my investigation, I will be reading two confessional poems by Robert Lowell, ‘Memories of West Street and Lepke’ and “Skunk Hour,’ which are derived from his poetry anthology ‘Life Studies.’ Gaining him worldwide recognition, Lowell’s confessional poetry intimately expresses his most personal and unflattering experiences often pertaining to trauma, death, depression and failed relationships. As I briefly mentioned in 3A, these particular poems lend themselves to the theoretical approaches of Marxism and new historicism and in particular, the theories associated with Louis Althusser and Michael Foucault. Such theorists draw upon the tools specific to the text-centered approach of poststructuralism such as semiotics and deconstruction. I will also be relying on autobiographical detail to give insight into the confessional texts, thus heavily employing the tools necessitated by an author-centered approach to reading. Upon completion of part 3A of this task, I was unsure as to whether psychoanalytical theories would be useful when exploring Lowell’s mental state and how this may have influenced his representation of American society. However, after sufficient research, I have come to the conclusion that certain psychoanalytical theories derived from theorists such as Freud and Lacan effectively illuminate aspects of Lowell’s unstable mental condition in the poems.

The first theoretical approach which can be aptly applied to both texts, Marxism, seeks to link literature *“to the conflicts between social groups that contend for economic and political power often by cultural means.”* (Ryan, 1999)Marxisttheorists such as Althusser and Greenblatt focus on texts in order to unpack their ideologies and show how these might represent the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. (Eagleton, 1996) This approach thus relies greatly on a text-centred approach to reading and often employs the poststructuralist theory of semiotics, which focuses on a system of signs in a mostly synchronic analysis. Here, theorists study the phenomena of linguistic features, without reference to the text’s historical context. Additionally, Derrida’s theories on deconstruction also prove to be a vital tool for Marxist analysis as they emphasize the importance of binary oppositions while also, in association with semiotics, concerns itself with the presence of differing ‘systems.’ In order to uncover the class discourses that operate within Lowell’s poetry, these tools can be used to deconstruct the texts and uncover Lowell’s often partial view of American society. For instance, in applying a semiotic approach to the texts, theoreticians look for certain ‘signs’ that are inevitably made up of a ‘signifier-‘ a symbol that evokes a concept and a ‘signified-‘ the embodiment of that concept. (Eagleton, 1996) Therefore, theorists can begin to identify those particular signifiers which, in the case of ‘Skunk Hour’ represent a patrician-based or biased observation of American society.

This particular tool of semiotics is very useful when applying what Marxist theoretician Louis Althusser would label ‘ideological state apparatuses.’ (Felluga, 2003) With a strict focus on ideology, Althusser’s theory complicates Marx’s understanding of the relation between base and superstructure and seeks to explore the ways in which ideology is more persuasive than originally assumed. Therefore, semiotic analysis can be employed so as to uncover the ideologies that operate within ‘Skunk Hour.’ In the poem, Lowell reminisces about a rich *“heiress”* who lives in a *“Spartan cottage,”* and who hungrily searches for the *“hierarchic privacy of Queen Victoria’s century.”* These particular phrases or ‘signifiers’ arouse assumptions of wealth and high-status, unearthing the patriarchal ideologies which operate within Lowell’s ‘ideological state apparatus.’ By identifying these ideologies using semiotic analysis, we can then begin to understand why certain ‘ideological state apparatuses,’ are privileged over others. Within the poem, Lowell speaks of the heiress as if she is a possession of *“Nautilus Island;”* a positive force in the community simply because of her wealth. Following this, the poet gives her certain attributes which are seen as ‘desirable,’ such as a successful son, who makes an enviable living as a bishop. Her farmer is also *“first selectman within the village,”* and her *“sheep graze above the sea,”* reiterating the patriarchal notion that physical possessions are responsible for her positive recognition within the community. Accordingly, being a confessional poem, ‘Skunk Hour’ reflects the discourses and common beliefs that belong to Lowell’s ‘ideological state apparatuses,’ and repress those ideologies that Lowell himself is unfamiliar with. Knowing this, we can begin to see why Lowell’s poetry tends to marginalize the bourgeois community and privilege the upper-class community to which Lowell himself belonged.

In the same sense, deconstruction can be applied to ‘Memories of West Street and Lepke’ in a bid to uncover Lowell’s natural prejudices and thus, his ‘ideological state apparatuses’. This theory looks to philosophy to see that any system necessarily posits a ‘centre’, *“a point from which everything comes, and to which everything refers or returns.”* (Klages, 1997) There exist two major points to this theory. Firstly, it must be recognized that the theory of deconstruction deals with systems or structures, rather than concrete practices, and also emphasizes the notion that these systems have a *“point of origin; the thing that created them in the first place.”* (Klages, 1997) Secondly, it must be acknowledged that these particular structures are created through binary oppositions. In Lowell’s poem, the social structure of the twentieth century can be regarded as the ‘system,’ while the binary oppositions such as *‘Catholic/Jehovah’s Witness*,’ and *‘hairy, muscular, suburban/flabby, bald, lobotomized’* can be viewed as the ‘centre’ of that system. In the same sense, Lowell’s experience in jail can also be viewed as the main system in which binaries *‘whole house/little segregated cell’* and *‘flame flamingo/bleaching khaki’* attempt to portray the negative effects of jail as opposed to the outside world. In accordance, Derrida argues that within each binary, the first term is always valued over the latter and that the predecessor is commonly a notion or characteristic that Western philosophy values. Thus, Lowell’s poem privileges the elitist beliefs of Catholic religion and also the specific characteristics that are associated with being a ‘real man.’ Thus, these particular beliefs and ideologies can be attributed to Lowell’s personal ‘ideological state apparatuses,’ which Althusser says commonly serves the *“cause of the ruling elite.”* (Felluga, 2003)

My second theoretical approach, new historicism, argues for a view of history within literature that emphasizes the *“many discourses or systems of representation that exist in dynamic interchange at a particular historical moment.”* (Ryan, 1999) Theorists such as Stephen Greenblatt and, in particular, Michael Foucault focus on the texts in light of their historical context; seeking to illuminate the power relations that exist within a text in regard to its production and reproduction. Although I had previously proposed to analyse both of my texts using this approach, I have since decided to only apply new historicist theories to ‘Memories of West Street and Lepke,’ as I feel ‘Skunk Hour’ could be more thoroughly examined through a psychoanalytical lens.

Lowell’s ‘Memories of West Street and Lepke,’ being written in 1946, reminisces on America’s social struggle during the Second World War. On the basis of Lowell’s time spent in prison and his later conscientious objection to serving in the military, this confessional poem can be regarded as, not only a depiction of the historical period in which it was written, but Lowell’s personal experiences and emotions towards imprisonment. In light of this, it can be seen that there are indisputable linkages between the text, the author, the societal context and the discourses that operated in that historical period. Accordingly, Foucault’s theories on power, or what he terms the ‘archaeology of knowledge production’ can be applied to the poem in order to uncover which discourses *“tend to exert a sort of pressure and something like a power of constraint on other discourses.”* (Pinkus, 1996)

According to new historicism, all texts can be interpreted *“amid the complexities of their own historical moment.”* (Knellwolf & Norris, 2001) Thus, Lowell’s confessional poetry can provide insights into certain historical moments, reiterating the belief that people are *“socially and linguistically constructed and created by various discourses of a given culture.”* (Newton, 1988) Throughout his dismal life, Lowell lost both of his parents, was admitted to numerous mental asylums and suffered three broken marriages, reflecting something of the discourses of upper-middle class America in the 1950’s. In examining the discursive nature of a text in light of its historicity, Foucault argues that the author can be regarded as a *“function of discourse itself.”* (Foucault, 1977) It can then be seen that sufficient autobiographical detail on Lowell will need to be researched in order to reveal the linkages between Lowell’s personal discourses and ideologies and those contained in ‘Memories of West Street and Lepke.’ For instance, Lowell explicitly portrays his initial antagonism towards the state by disclosing that he *“hogs a house on Boston’s hardly passionate Marlborough Street where even the man scavenging filth in the back alley trash cans, has two children, a beach wagon, a helpmate, and is a ‘young Republican.”* Lowell’s poem also concerns itself with political discourse, but from a very bitter and rather rebellious standpoint as he *“made [his] manic statement, telling off the state and president.”* This may be due to Lowell’s antagonism towards the political structure of the time, which denied him the status of a conscientious objector and sentenced him to prison. His confinement in jail directly relates to the “forces of containment” with which new historicists concern themselves. These theorists, such as Foucault, look at the *“ways hegemonic forces consolidate the status quo,”* and also try to identify any moments of *“rupture”* within the text in order to examine how certain forces of upheaval, such as the political mayhem brought on by the war, can be *“co-opted by the powers that be.”* (Felluga, 2003) In this case, the negative portrayal of America on Lowell’s behalf is characteristic of the time it was written, as America was struggling through the Depression and of course, the Second World War.

The unearthing of the historical discourses to which Lowell was subjected relates to Foucault’s theory of ‘discursive fields,’ which attempts to understand the relationship between language, social institutions, subjectivity and power. By using the new historicist tools, we can see that Lowell belonged to an aristocratic ‘discursive field,’ while his religious beliefs led him to be part of a Republican ‘discursive field.’ Following this, these ‘fields’ can then begin to exert power over others, such as the aristocrats do over the bourgeois in ‘Memories of West Street and Lepke.’ (Pinkus, 1996) In the same sense, new historicists also seek to uncover the social stereotypes present in the text in order to connect these with the historical context to which the text belongs. Through his poetry, Lowell symbolizes the typical stereotype of the fifties, with references to men *“scavenging filth,”* and to himself as a *“fire-breathing Catholic”* who was subjected to a *“Negro boy with curlicues of marijuana”* and beaten black and blue by *“hairy, muscular and suburban Hollywood pimps.”*  Thus, this poem represents a depressed and often drugged view of the *“tranquilized fifties,”* capturing the barren social life of the twentieth century. In the same sense, Lowell also portrays the marginalized groups of society, such as the *“J.W’s”* and refers to *“Czar Lepke,”* a rather privileged prisoner who filled his *“segregated cell full of things forbidden to the common man: a portable radio, a dresser, two toy American flags tied together with a ribbon of Easter palm.”* Lepke is thus representative of American society, as he has been bureaucratized and depersonalized, just as American had when they began to hold the power to annihilate mankind during the Second World War. Accordingly, Lepke is also an explicit symbol of the effects of the state’s power, as he begins to lose all connections and *“drifts in a sheepish calm,”* reflecting the ultimate conformity experienced during the twentieth century.

On the other hand, psychoanalytical theory attempts to gain access into the author’s unconscious by scrupulously investigating their restrained impulses and internal conflicts. Produced through repression, psychoanalytical theorists believe that *“the unconscious peaks in the world through dreams”* (Lye, 1999) and is powered by libidinal drives which are an inevitable force in our lives. Following this idea, Freud, a leading psychoanalytical theorist coins the term ‘parapraxes,’ which he believes to be *“certain unconscious desires which will not be denied,”* (Eagleton, 1996) but which dare not find practical outlet. Therefore, ‘Skunk Hour’ can be rendered an explicit exploration of Lowell’s struggle with mental illness, where the poem provides a suitable outlet for the poet’s repressed feelings, often relating to sexuality and violence.

In looking at the *“language of the text,”* (Pope, 2002) theorists explore the nature of expression, which ultimately reveals hidden or concealed information about the author. Therefore, in applying a psychoanalytical lens to ‘Skunk Hour,’ it can be seen that the person who hears an *“ill-spirit sob in each blood cell,”* is in fact Lowell himself and that the decaying sea town in the poem represents the rotting social structure of the twentieth century. Following this, Lacanian critics also believe that language conditions our unconscious and thereby constructs our sense of self. Although, in order to construct one’s sense of ‘self’, three stages of the psychosexual trajectory (Klages, 2001) must be completed. This refers to the process in which a child passes through maturity and adulthood and undergoes the three stages of the human psyche, the real, the imaginary and the symbolic. (Klages, 2001) The first stage of this development, the real, refers to the early years of a child’s life which are a complex, shifting field of libidinal force in which the subject has no *“centre of identity and has indeterminate boundaries with the external world.”* (Lye, 1999) Thus, a thirst for the ability to satisfy one’s need with certain objects arises. In ‘Skunk Hour,’ Lowell’s search for love is evident as he *“watches for love-cars,”* but it eventually subsides as he satisfies himself by watching the skunks *“search in the moonlight,”* and by the *“nine-knot yawl”* that gets *“auctioned off to lobstermen.”*

However, as Lowell begins to progress through the imaginary stage, he becomes partially aware of his sense of self by ‘borrowing’ identity from other significant figures such as his parents. (Moon, 1992) This stage allows the subject to see themselves from the outside, thus paving the way for the development of a separate identity. Accordingly, this identity then develops certain demands that are no longer satisfiable by objects, but rather the love from another being. However, when one finds that their demands cannot be met, Lacan believes a persons’ sense of self is at risk of being destroyed. (Klages, 2001) In the case of ‘Skunk Hour,’ Lowell becomes extremely depressed, stating that *“I myself am hell”* after hearing *“Love, O careless Love”* bleat from the radio. In realizing his lack of and at the same time, his desperation for love, Lowell’s sense of self is compromised by his hopelessness and despair. Adding to this, Lowell’s *“hand at his throat”* is a clear image of his complete mental disintegration and his contemplation of suicide. Thus, Lowel is engrossed in a condition of complete mental dissolution which forces his sense of self into a state of division.

Completing the trio, Lowell enters into the final stage of the symbolic, wherein he begins to recognize his sense of self, after coming to terms with his ‘lack.’ (Klages, 2001) In the poem, we see Lowell accepting his surroundings as the skunks arrive with their *“moonstruck eyes red with fire.”* The skunks, portraying the disintegrating mind of the poet, *“march on their soles up Main Street”* and become a symbol of demonic possession within Lowell’s world. However, the skunks also provide a glimmer of hope for Lowell, as he sees them tend to their young, realizing the unfolding nature of life. The *“garbage pail”* and the skunk are thus analogous to Lowell and his world, as he recognizes that he can gain control over his life, just as the skunks *“will not scare.”* Through the aforementioned battle with his self, Lowell starts on a path of self recognition, where he therapeutically comes to terms with his own world as he *“stands on top of the back steps and breathes the rich air.”* According to this, it can be seen that Lowell underwent the three stages of the psychosexual trajectory, and thus, is only able to represent the world that is particular to his self.

Ultimately, through the application of Marxist, new historical and psychoanalytical literary theory, I have discovered that confessional poetry can act as a mediator through which an author can expose the discourses and ideological values of the society in which they were immersed. Similarly, I have also learnt that a text elucidates a multiplicity of interpretations depending on the time it was written and the type of theory that is applied. Following this, I believe that certain forms of literature such as confessional poetry have the ability to shape our consciousness by providing explicit insights into the human condition and by forcing us to tend to certain issues relating to personal identity and societal awareness.

# Marxist Literary Criticism: Brief Guide

Along with psychoanalytical, feminist, and cultural criticism, Marxist literary criticism exemplifies what the French philosopher Paul Ricouer terms a "hermeneutics of suspicion." These are approaches that concern themselves not with what the text says but what it hides. As Terry Eagleton, a leading Marxist critic, writes, the task of Marxist literary criticism "is to show the text as it cannot know itself, to manifest those conditions of its making (inscribed in its very letter) about which it is necessarily silent."

By its very nature, **ideology** is silent. Like the water in the aquarium breathed by the fish, ideology is virtually invisible. Its invisibility gives it greater power. Ideology - defined in general as the shared beliefs and values held in an unquestioning manner by a culture - exerts a powerful influence upon a culture. Those who are marginalized in the culture are most aware of the ways in which an ideology supports the dominant class in the society. Those who enjoy the fruits of belonging to a dominant group of the society barely generally are filled with what Marx called **"false consciousness."**Since it is not in their interest to notice the ways in which an economic structure marginalizes others, they tend to buy into an ideology that supports that structure.

**Recurrent terms in Marxist literary criticism:**

* **Base vs. Superstructure:**Base in Marxism refers to economic base. Superstructure, according to Marx and Engels, emerges from this base and consists of law, politics, philosophy, religion, art.
* **Ideology:**the shared beliefs and values held in an unquestioning manner by a culture. It governs what that culture deems to be normative and valuable. For Marxists, **ideology** is determined by economics. A rough approximation: "tell me how much money you have and I'll tell you how you think."
* **Hegemony:**coined by the Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci, this "refers to the pervasive system of assumptions, meanings, and values -- the web of ideologies, in other words, that shapes the way things look, what they mean, and therefore what reality *is*for the majority of people within a given culture" (See glossary in case studies in contemporary criticism book).
* **Reification:**often used to describe the way in which people are turned into commodities useful in market exchange. For example, some would argue that the media's obsession with tragedy (e.g.the deaths of Jon Benet Ramsay, Diana, JFK Jr., the murders at Columbine High School in Colorado) make commodities out of grieving people. The media expresses sympathy but economically thrives on these events through ratings boost.

**What do Marxist literary critics do with texts?**

* **They explore ways in which the text reveals ideological oppression of a dominant economic class over subordinate classes. In order to do this a Marxist might ask the following questions:**
  + **Does the text reflect or resist a dominant ideology? Does it do both?**
  + **Does the main character in a narrative affirm or resist bourgeoisie values?**
  + **Whose story gets told in the text? Are lower economic groups ignored or devalued?**
  + **Are values that support the dominant economic group given privilege? This can happen tacitly, in the way in which values are taken to be self-evident.**
* They look at the conditions of production for the work of art. For example, they ask
  + What were the economic conditions for publication of a work?
  + Who was the audience? What does the text suggest about the values of this audience?

**What other approaches resemble Marxist literary criticism?**

* Marxist literary criticism often shares with feminist criticism a desire to challenge the power structures in contemporary society. For feminist, the issue is a marginalized gender; for Marxists, the issue is not gender but economic power, leading to political power.
* Marxist literary criticism can also be viewed as a type of **cultural criticism**, in that it seeks to analyze a discourse (of power) that makes up one of the discourses that determine a text's historical meaning. <http://www1.assumption.edu/users/ady/hhgateway/gateway/Marxistlitcrit.html>

**Marxism**

<http://public.wsu.edu/~delahoyd/marxist.crit.html>

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was primarily a theorist and historian (less the evil pinko commie demon that McCarthyism fretted about). After examining social organization in a scientific way (thereby creating a methodology for social science: political science), he perceived human history to have consisted of a series of struggles between classes--between the oppressed and the oppressing. Whereas Freud saw "sexual energy" to be the motivating factor behind human endeavor and Nabokov seemed to feel artistic impulse was the real factor, Marx thought that "historical materialism" was the ultimate driving force, a notion involving the distribution of resources, gain, production, and such matters.

The supposedly "natural" political evolution involved (and would in the future involve) "feudalism" leading to "bourgeois capitalism" leading to "socialism" and finally to "utopian communism." In bourgeois capitalism, the privileged bourgeoisie rely on the proletariat--the labor force responsible for survival. Marx theorized that when profits are not reinvested in the workers but in creating more factories, the workers will grow poorer and poorer until no short-term patching is possible or successful. At a crisis point, revolt will lead to a restructuring of the system.

For a political system to be considered communist, the underclasses must own the means of production--not the government nor the police force. Therefore, aside from certain first-century Christian communities and other temporary communes, communism has not yet really existed. (The Soviet Union was actually state-run capitalism.)

Marx is known also for saying that "Religion is the opiate of the people," so he was somewhat aware of the problem that Lenin later dwelt on. Lenin was convinced that workers remain largely unaware of their own oppression since they are convinced by the state to be selfless. One might point to many "opiates of the people" under most political systems--diversions that prevent real consideration of trying to change unjust economic conditions.

**Marxist Criticism**

According to Marxists, and to other scholars in fact, literature reflects those social institutions out of which it emerges and is itself a social institution with a particular ideological function. Literature reflects class struggle and materialism: think how often the quest for wealth traditionally defines characters. So Marxists generally view literature "not as works created in accordance with timeless artistic criteria, but as 'products' of the economic and ideological determinants specific to that era" (Abrams 149). Literature reflects an author's own class or analysis of class relations, however piercing or shallow that analysis may be.

The Marxist critic simply is a careful reader or viewer who keeps in mind issues of power and money, and any of the following kinds of questions:

* **What role does class play in the work; what is the author's analysis of class relations?**
* **How do characters overcome oppression?**
* **In what ways does the work serve as propaganda for the status quo; or does it try to undermine it?**
* **What does the work say about oppression; or are social conflicts ignored or blamed elsewhere?**
* **Does the work propose some form of utopian vision as a solution to the problems encountered in the work?**

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